United Nations ECE/CES/2015/35

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 May 2015

English only

**Economic Commission for Europe**

Conference of European Statisticians

**Sixty-third plenary session**
Geneva, 15-17 June 2015
Item 3 of the provisional agenda
**Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals**

# Everyone counts: Ensuring a response of official statistics to Sustainable Development Goals consistent with human rights

**Note by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

*Summary*

The paper consideres how to develop statistics measuring equality and non-discrimination. The paper shows that much can be learned from existing collaborative initiatives of official statistics and human rights community based on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) framework for human rights indicators. The paper illustrates how this framework gives guidance on the development of indicators anchored in human rights standards and on expanding data sources to account for the experiences of the most marginalized populations. The paper will provide recommendations on the role of international organizations and official statistics in enforcing common standards and ensuring that data is a global public good that supports the respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights.

The paper is presented for discussion to the second session of the Conference of European Statisticians' seminar "Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals".

GE.15-09214 (E)

*1509214*

Please recycle

# I. Introduction

1. In 2015, leaders and people across the world have a unique opportunity to make real our shared vision of ending poverty, while protecting the environment, ensuring peace and realizing human rights for all. The new development agenda known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the successor of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will be finalized. And statisticians across the world are being asked to serve as torchbearers; illuminating our path with information on where we stand towards the future we want.

2. Numerous voices across the globe have echoed the call for a new, universal, and transformative sustainable development agenda that is built on human rights and on a data revolution that leaves no one behind. This unanimous call has been made by civil society organizations[1], the United Nations[2], States[3], international human rights mechanisms[4] and statisticians[5] themselves. The report 'A World that Counts – Mobilizing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development' clearly stated that "*Any legal or regulatory mechanism, or networks or partnerships, set up to mobilize the data revolution for sustainable development should have the protection of human rights as a core part of their activities, specify who is responsible for upholding those rights, and should support the protection, respect and fulfilment of human rights*".[6]

3. With SDGs and a data revolution that call for a world that counts, where no group of people and no issue remains invisible, how can national statistical systems and international organizations maximize the opportunities and take on the challenges this revolution presents?

## A. Why are human rights and statistics interdependent?

4. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics explicitly recognize the rights of members of society. Statistical offices have a critical responsibility to inform policy making processes and provide the public with high quality statistics about the state of the society. In the human rights field, statisticians play a critical role in supporting evidence-based policy making and in monitoring realisation of

[1] Outcome document of the 65th Annual UN DPI/NGO Conference, August 2014.

[2] SG Synthesis Report 'Road to Dignity by 2030': 'the agenda itself mirrors the broader international human rights framework, including elements of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, as well as the right to development'.

[3] The outcome document of the Open working Group (OWG) includes goals and targets on human rights issues and calls for broader data disaggregation.

[4] Treaty bodies and Special Rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations issued several statements on the Post-2015 development agenda, see http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15505&LangID=E and http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13341&.

[5] See the Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the indicator framework for the post-2015 development agenda, SA/STAT/441/2/58A/L3, Statistics and indicators for the Post-2015 development agenda, report by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, and the compendium of Statistical Notes, containing a note on Human Rights, including the right to development.

[6] Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (2014). 'A World That Counts: Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development' Report prepared at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General, p. 23, accessible at http://www.undatarevolution.org/report/

civil, economic, political and social rights. In accordance with internationally accepted standards, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the dissemination of relevant statistical information is essential to meet peoples' right to information and delivering on the fundamental human rights principles of participation and accountability.[7]

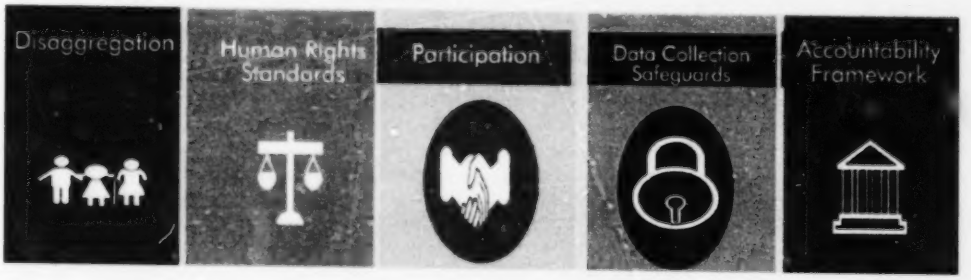
5. Efforts to protect human rights facilitate the establishment of trustworthy statistics. Upholding rights, such as the rights to privacy, to self-identification and to be registered is vital to ensure robustness and independence in official statistical systems. It is equally essential to ensure respect for the human rights of statisticians themselves, and prevent either State authorities or third parties from pressuring them to conceal unpalatable truths.

6. SDGs and associated data revolution offer an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the link between statistics and human rights. This revolution implies an increased role for statisticians to contribute to the protection of human rights and to further integrate human rights considerations in their work. It also presents an opportunity for national statistical systems and international organizations to expand and improve their common statistical tools and thereby their capacity to respond to the needs of society. Taken seriously, these opportunities require answers on:

- How to count everyone and ensure no one is excluded from datasets?
- How to ensure that human rights are respected in the full spectrum of data production?

## II. How can official statisticians and international organizations respond to SDGs in a manner that is consistent with human rights?

7. In responding to the challenges posed by SDGs, lessons from existing collaborative initiatives of national statistical and the human rights community in developing human rights indicators could provide guidance.[8] A human rights-based approach to statistics and data implies:




[7] The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities contains provisions on the role of statistics and data collection in order for State parties to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the convention.

[8] For more information about human rights indicators, see '*Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation*'. HR/PUB/12/5, accessible at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/HRIndicatorsIndex.aspx

**(a) Disaggregating indicators by grounds of discrimination prohibited by international human rights law** in order that no-one is excluded or left behind, and in conformity with SDG17.18 which states that indicators should be disaggregated by "income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national context". **This requires strengthening capacities to produce and analyse more disaggregated data, measure the disparities between groups and monitor the reduction of inequalities, in order to close the gaps between groups. For the smallest groups or those invisible in official statistics, new partnerships and use of innovative technology and statistical techniques, including mapping, targeted surveys, small area estimation may be required.**[9]

**(b) Measuring implementation of human rights standards critical to the realisation of SDGs**, including availability, accessibility and quality of rights-related services (e.g. health care, education) and goods (e.g. water); use of maximum available resources domestically and internationally; non-discrimination and equality; participation; access to justice and freedom from violence. A forward-looking approach to measuring the new goals and targets is needed, so that the priorities of SDGs are not limited by existing data and data sources. In addition, promoting serious investment in the development of new data, including topics that are currently not part of official statistics[10], and data sources, including non-traditional sources which meet relevant statistical and human rights standards.[11] **This reqires coordinating the validation of data from new data sources (e.g. civil society, human rights organizations) and ensuring that they comply with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.**

**(c) Facilitating participation of the population, especially disadvantaged and marginalized members of society and other relevant stakeholders in the measurement process.** Participation is a fundamental principle of human rights. There are already a number of collaborative efforts involving national statistical offices, representatives of population groups and national human rights institutions, such as in Denmark on gender and persons with disabilities, in the Philippines on indigenous peoples, and in Bolivia on economic and social rights.[12] This would require a more institutionalized partnership between official statistics and the human rights community, e.g. through participation of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)[13] or civil society organisations in the preparation of the national strategies for the development of statistics, in national statistical advisory councils, negotiation of Memoranda of Understanding for data collection on human

[9] For more on disaggregation, see 'Ensuring no one is left behind: A human rights-based approach to data', accessible at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/MDG/Pages/MDGPost2015Agenda.aspx

[10] Some examples are the human rights and governance perception surveys in Africa, http://ea.au.int/en/statistics; and Australian Bureau of Statistics survey on feelings of personal safety, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features40Jun+2010

[11] UNESCO data on safety of journalists, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/safety-of-journalists/;

[12] For more details on these initiatives, see www.humanrights.dk/disability, http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/oecd-journal-on-development-volume-9-issue-2_journal_dev-v9-2-en, http://www.ine.gob.bo/indicadoresddhh/alim4.asp,

[13] NHRIs are independent administrative body set up by a State to promote and protect human rights. An inter-governmental body of NHRIs oversees a peer-review process of their independence. There are currently 108 NHRIs across the world. For more information, see http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/HRIndicatorsIndex.aspx

rights, references to human rights, when appropriate, in preparation of metadata, and providing training on human rights to statisticians and on basic statistics to human rights practitioners. **This requires developing governance mechanisms on a strengthened partnership of official statistics and human rights institutions.**

**(d) Ensuring human rights safeguards in the collection, processing and dissemination of data**, including data confidentiality, non-discrimination and self-identification[14]. The surveyed population, data producers and users must be able to operate freely and be protected from reprisals. **This requires working together on developing guidelines to ensure that the full spectrum of data production conforms to legal and institutional standards on ethics, statistics and human rights.**

**(e) Strengthening accountability and policy coherence** by measuring not only outcomes, but processes (legal, institutional and policy), relevant in assessing the extent of efforts being made to reach SDG targets. Any new global review mechanism for post-2015 development commitments should explicitly refer to international human rights treaty standards, and should ensure rigorous independent review, effective civil society participation and high-level political accountability. National tailoring should not be used as a chance for States to dilute or retract from their legal and policy commitments at the global level[15] **This requires that national statisticians take an active role in setting up an accountability framework and effective national tailoring for the SDGs.**

8. Cooperation among statistical systems, international organizations, policy makers, human rights institutions, civil society and marginalized and vulnerable populations, will be fundamental in the effective monitoring of SDGs and in making sure that everyone counts.

---

[14] The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has made clear that identification as a member of a particular ethnic group "shall, if no justification exists to the contrary, be based upon self-identification by the individual concerned." The UN Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses advise that information on ethnicity be acquired through self-declaration of a respondent and also that respondents have the option of indicating multiple ethnic affiliations.

[15] For more on discussion on accountability, see http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/WhoWillBeAccountable.pdf